



Like two knights passing in a ship

So, these two shop stewards run into each other at the Balderdash Curio Seminar in Soupcakes, Virginia, and, as most stewards do whenever they run into each other, they talk in “grievance-ese.”

“You know what really tees me off, is the fact that my postmaster, who’s not really a bad guy, doesn’t have the authority to do diddly squat,” says Sally. Karen smiles and just listens.

Sally continues, “I’ve filed staffing grievances, overtime grievances, service window grievances, maximization grievances, you name it. I got grievances up the kazoo and my postmaster tells me that he totally understands my arguments, that I’m right, that he’s with me 150 percent, but that he can’t do anything because he is being mandated to run his office the way he is and the district and the area are micro-managing him into the ground and there is nothing he can do about it. So, I just handle the cases, put them together, turn them over to my branch president and they all get appealed to the Step B team. It’s so darn frustrating, I feel like I’m caught in the role of a minor character in ‘The Neverending Story.’”

Karen asks, “So when you file those grievances, do you ever write a statement for the file, regarding the postmaster being totally in agreement with you, but that he can’t do anything about it? Do you ever ask him who, specifically, is giving him the requirement to do what he does that violates the contract and do you ever interview whoever person that is? Do you ever cite, among the other contractual sections, Article 15, Section 2, Informal Step A [b]¹ and Article 15, Section 2, Formal Step A [c]², as being violated?”

“Whoa, whoa, slow down,” Sally says. “What are you talking about?”

“Well,” Karen answers, “there’s no big secret that installations are being micro-managed from the area and district levels, that operational plans and strategies are being shoved down postmasters’ throats, and that a lot of things, like staffing, service windows, and the like, are not rational things to implement the way they are in many offices. It’s also no big secret that if managers at the local level were allowed to have discretion on that kind of deci-

sion making, in most places, the complement would be filled by career hires, the routes that were too heavy would be adjusted. When service windows don’t make business sense and serve to accelerate the number of Article 8 violations, managers would not implement such windows. Unfortunately, higher-level management doesn’t trust lower level managers to manage, and you get micro-managing.

“So, when a manager tells me that he or she doesn’t have the authority to fix a grievance, I write a statement and include it in the grievance file that the manager admitted to me that he or she didn’t have the authority to settle the grievance. I charge management with the violations of the articles I just mentioned, and I ask for the name of and request to interview the manager who allegedly made the decision that is causing my grievance.

“Normally, they won’t let me interview the manager at the district or area level, so I include another violation of the contract in the grievance, Article 17, Section 3, third paragraph of the National Agreement.³ I also request, in writing, that I be provided any and all correspondence, e-mails, etc., between local management and the district or the area on the topic that I am grieving, requests for new career hires or increase in complement—as an example, in a staffing grievance. If they don’t respond at all, I add to the grievance Article 17, Section 3 and Article 31 of the contract to provisions being violated. I also ask that they provide the remedy I requested that would have been granted had the local supervisor or postmaster had the authority to resolve the grievance.”

“Wow!” replies Sally, “You’ve helped me out a lot. Tell you what, lunch is on me.”

“Sounds great,” Karen replies. “Just remember, don’t get frustrated; if you’ve got a problem, find the solution.” ✉

¹ In any such discussion the supervisor shall have authority to resolve the grievance.

² The installation head or designee also shall have authority to resolve the grievance in whole or in part.

³ The steward, chief steward or other Union representative properly certified in accordance with Section 2 above may request and shall obtain access through the appropriate supervisor to review the documents, files and other records necessary for processing a grievance or determining if a grievance exists and shall have the right to interview the aggrieved employee(s), supervisors and witnesses during working hours. Such requests shall not be unreasonably denied.